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Recommended Citation

Center for Persons With Disabilities, "Keeping Memories Alive: Prevention Is the Key" (2011). *Blog Posts*. 370.

https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cpd_blog/370

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KEEPING MEMORIES ALIVE: PREVENTION IS THE KEY

June 1, 2011 by cpehrson



Has this ever happened to you?

You are ready to go out the door and you can't find your keys. Worst of all, you can't even remember when you had them last.

Or you forget the name of the person you just met today at work.

Or you missed your mother's birthday...again!

The bad news is that the older we get, the more our brain cells die off. They start dying off in our early twenty's, and as we age, we lose more and more.

But, the good news is, the brain is capable of producing new brain cells at any age, so *significant* memory loss is *not* an inevitable result of aging.

You might be asking yourself these questions: *What's normal when it comes to memory loss as I age? Can I do about anything about it? When should I become concerned enough to go see a doctor about it? Am I getting Alzheimer's or dementia?*

When memory lapses become frequent enough to cause concern, or sufficiently noticeable to concern a family member, maybe it is time to see your primary physician and have a thorough physical examination.

In the meantime, there are some things that you can do to prevent more memory loss than is normally associated with aging:

Just as it is with muscle strength, you have to *use it or lose it*. Your lifestyle, health habits, and daily activities have a huge impact on the health of your brain. The same practices that contribute to healthy aging and physical vitality also contribute to healthy memory.

Tip #1: **Exercise regularly.** It boosts brain growth and encourages the development of new brain cells.

Tip #2: **Stay social.** Social interaction challenges the mind and wards off stress and depression-other memory killers.

Tip #3: **Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and omega-3 fats.** Antioxidants, found in abundance in fresh produce, literally keep your brain cells from "rusting." And foods rich in omega-3 fats (such as salmon, tuna, trout, walnuts, and flaxseed) are particularly good for your brain and memory.

Tip #4: **Manage stress.** When you're stressed out, you're more likely to suffer memory lapses and have trouble learning and concentrating.

Tip #5: **Get plenty of sleep.** Sleep is necessary for memory consolidation, the process of forming and storing new memories so you can retrieve them later. Sleep deprivation reduces the growth of new neurons and causes problems with memory, concentration, and decision-making.

Tip #6: **Don't smoke.** Smoking heightens the risk of vascular disorders that can cause stroke and constrict arteries that deliver oxygen to the brain.

Note: *This is the first in a series of blogs about fighting memory loss that will be posted throughout the summer.*